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New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ms. Marinčić
	Brazil	Mr. Garcia
	China	Mr. Zhang Changwei
	Colombia	Mr. Alzate
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Gabon	Mrs. Ntyam-Ehya
	Germany	Mr. Eick
	India	Mr. Ragutthalli
	Lebanon	Mr. Ramadan
	Portugal	Ms. Vaz Pato
	Russian Federation	Mr. Demin
	South Africa	Mr. Klaas
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Miss Allum
	United States of America	Mr. Grant

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Bahrain. Unless I hear any objection, I invite the representative of Bahrain to participate in this meeting.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Morejón (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to convey, on behalf of the Government of Ecuador, our sympathy with the sisterly nation of Turkey in connection with the earthquake that took place yesterday and to express our condolences to the families of the victims. We were also saddened to hear of the passing of the heir to the throne of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and shares the sorrow of King Abdullah, the royal family and the people of Saudi Arabia.

My delegation would like to express its views on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. I should like to begin by thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. My country aligns itself with the statement by the Ambassador of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Government of Ecuador, which abides by the norms and principles of international law, particularly with regard to the pacific settlement of disputes, wishes to express its concern at the length of time during which the Security Council has been seized with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — seven decades. My delegation is keen to support stability in the region and has recognized Palestine as a State.

The developments that have taken place in recent months, including the historic address by President Abbas before the General Assembly, on 23 September; the organizing of legislative and presidential elections in Palestine; and the support of most States Members of the United Nations for the recognition of Palestine as a State are further evidence of the fact that the Palestinian Authority is capable of governing itself as a State.

Another positive step towards peace is the prisoner exchange between Israel and Palestine, which is taking place in stages. The international community welcomed the freeing of the Israeli soldier and of 477 Palestinian prisoners on 18 October.

It is regrettable, however, that the progress achieved through international efforts, including the recent statement of the Quartet on resuming and making progress in direct peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, has come to naught because of Israel's lack of clear parameters on its settlement policies. The Palestinian people suffer humiliation, expulsion and violence at the hands of the continuing Israeli occupation and are the victims of aggressive and illegal actions. This has not changed and continues with impunity.

In addition, the construction by the occupying military force of the Wall in Jerusalem prevents Palestinians from having access to hospitals, schools and their places of work. The Palestinians also suffer as a result of inadequate public services; schools are few, and the economy is in ruins. Jerusalem does not have a production economy, and Israel controls the entire territory.

The international community must bring pressure to bear in Israel to end the occupation. It is Israel's responsibility to make progress with the negotiations so as to achieve the two-State solution, in keeping with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and, of course, the Road Map.

In that connection, we would remind the Security Council of its historic responsibility to positively analyse this issue, which for more than 64 years has posed an obstacle to the achievement of peace and security in the Middle East and in the eastern Mediterranean region.

My delegation appeals for a dialogue between the parties with the goal of ensuring that in the very near future, the two States of Israel and Palestine can coexist in the region, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to convey our most

sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Turkey in connection with the tragedy that they have suffered as a result of yesterday's earthquake.

Nicaragua, as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, associates itself fully with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt in his capacity as Chair of the Movement.

Nicaragua once again reiterates its most fervent condemnation of the illegal occupation by Israel of all of the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, and demands Israel's immediate withdrawal. We condemn the expansionist Israeli policies and practices of building and not dismantling settlements, as well as the inhumane blockade of Gaza and the policy of breaking up the West bank and other Palestinian territories.

The Security Council is meeting on the eve of a historic moment that will give undeniable reality to the existence of a Palestinian State that is recognized and fully welcomed into our Organization, and represent the implementation, at long last, of the many resolutions and agreements calling for the creation of two States — one Arab and the other Jewish — on Palestinian territory.

We can no longer tolerate the logic of denying the very existence of the Palestinian State. That logic is part and parcel of a policy of corraling the Palestinian people, and it is based on an unacknowledged determination to deny all Palestinian citizens their very humanity. It is extremely urgent that Israel free, as soon as possible, all Palestinian political prisoners, who suffer, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, inhumane conditions, torture, captivity and indefinite isolation. Israel must put an end to those violations and comply with its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

Since the victory of the Sandinista popular revolution, in 1979, Nicaragua has witnessed the heroic fight of the Palestinian people and the substantial concessions they have made, which, shamefully, were responded to by Israel with more illegal settlements, more humiliation, more deaths, more systematic murders of Palestinian leaders, more destruction of homes and more expulsions, including in East Jerusalem.

For all of those reasons, Nicaragua reiterates the need to put an immediate end to the intolerable impunity that Israel enjoys, which has been irresponsibly guaranteed it by the Security Council, in particular through the indiscriminate use of the veto, which has become Israel's greatest accomplice.

It is high time that the Security Council lived up to its responsibilities and demand that Israel make a commitment to peace. It is time to abandon threats of veto. It is time for the international community to substitute concrete action for rhetoric. Nicaragua thus calls for the immediate recognition of the Palestinian State along its 1967 borders by the Security Council and the General Assembly. Only in this way will there be a firm and lasting peace that allows both peoples to effectively enjoy all their rights, putting an end to an inexplicable injustice. May those who oppose it do so publicly, and thereby publicly acknowledge their own shamefulness.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): Allow me at the outset to express our gratitude to those who have expressed condolences and sympathies to my Government and the Turkish people at this time of loss and suffering following the devastating earthquake in Turkey. We have felt the solidarity of the international community with us. We also want to extend our heartfelt condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi people for the passing away of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

As the Security Council holds another open debate on the situation in the Middle East, a long-awaited transformation and restoration process is under way in the region. The quest for democracy in the region may be delayed, but it cannot be reversed. As the advocate of democracy, pluralism, human rights and fundamental freedoms in the region, Turkey will not waver in its support for those who are peacefully demanding change.

We welcome the conclusion of the rightful struggle of the Libyan people for freedom, justice and democracy with a decisive victory. The fate of the autocratic regime that prevailed for more than four decades constitutes a bitter lesson that should be taken into account in all its dimensions within the context of the ongoing change and democratic transformation movements in the region. We strongly believe that the

political process in Libya will be completed in unity and solidarity through an inclusive approach embracing all segments of that society.

Meanwhile, we welcome resolution 2014 (2011) on Yemen, adopted unanimously by the Security Council, as a timely, constructive and positive step taken by the international community with a view to bringing an end to the clashes in that country. Turkey fully supports the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative. We reaffirm our wish that the crisis in the country be overcome through peaceful means as soon as possible.

In that context, Turkey is extremely concerned about the developments in Syria. We observed with great concern the ongoing violence against civilians in Syria. Violence is not the effective to follow. Sectarian and ethnic divides must be avoided at all cost. The legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people should be respected.

While many in the region aspire to a better future, Palestinians in their millions — whether in Gaza, the West Bank or the refugee camps across the region — continue to suffer a disastrous fate not of their own making. This anomaly must be addressed as a matter of utmost urgency. Turkey rejects violence in any shape or form, and by any party, as unacceptable and unjustifiable. We also believe that there can be no genuine alternative to a negotiated settlement.

There is no doubt that meaningful engagement that inspires confidence in both Palestine and Israel cannot begin while settlement activity continues day in and day out, including in occupied East Jerusalem. Indeed, Israel's continuous settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories and its deliberate choice for settlements of the regions that separate the Palestinian territories destroy the basis for peace. We once again call on Israel, based on its Road Map commitments, to cease all settlement activity and return to direct negotiations with the Palestinian side on the basis of the 1967 borders. That is currently the only way that will open the path towards the realization of a two-State solution based on the well-established principles whereby Israel and Palestine can live side by side in peace and security.

Palestine has submitted its application for membership to the United Nations. That historic step was long in coming. Turkey believes that it is high time for Palestine to become a Member of the United Nations and to be recognized by all nations, based on

its 1967 borders, as a full-fledged Member State within the international community.

The very notion of a two-State solution, reaching as far back as 1947, is the firm and clear basis for that. Common sense and good conscience dictate that, as Israel did 63 years ago, Palestine should become a Member of the United Nations. That will also help direct negotiations, since it will create political equality between the two parties. Ultimately, beyond all the legal or political arguments, it is simply not fair to hold the State of Palestine hostage to Israel's continued intransigence.

Turkey welcomes the recent prisoner exchange. This is a humanitarian issue and, irrespective of other developments, Turkey has played its part to support the talks and to ensure that a fair deal could be struck that would also help create a positive atmosphere for addressing other issues.

Meanwhile, the situation in the Gaza Strip continues to be an embarrassment to the international community. The inhumane and illegal practices there must end. Unfortunately, Israel's unlawful blockade of Gaza continues. The international community must ensure that there is accountability both for the blockade and for Israel's attack on the humanitarian aid flotilla last year that left nine civilians dead in international waters. That is why we envisage mobilizing the relevant platforms, with the support of Member States, in order to refer that issue to the International Court of Justice.

On the other hand, having welcomed the unity agreement among the Palestinians, Turkey hopes that the process of national reconciliation can be concluded soon with the formation of an inclusive and democratically representative Government that will take the Palestinian nation to free and fair elections.

In conclusion, let me reiterate once more Turkey's strong support for the realization of a just and lasting comprehensive peace in the region, based on the two-State solution, as well as our determination to assist our Palestinian brothers and sisters in attaining their long-delayed goal of a viable, peaceful and prosperous State of Palestine that is a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): First of all, the Maldives would like to offer its sincere condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for the recent tragedy. We are also deeply saddened by the passing of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and would like to extend our deepest condolences.

The Maldives congratulates Nigeria on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and commends the work completed to date. We further thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing today.

The Maldives has recently undergone a transition from autocracy to democracy, and we understand full well the growing pains that come with such a transformation. Yet we sincerely hope that the situation in Syria will find a peaceful solution and that the dialogue process to take place in Cairo will see fruit in the form of greater democratic reforms and will create venues for the aspirations of the Syrian people to have their voice heard in Government.

The Maldives applauded resolution 1973 (2011) on Libya, and now supports that country's current transition to a functioning democracy. Much work remains to be done by the National Transitional Council to prepare for elections that will be free, fair and meaningful in order to realize the aspirations of the Libyan people. Only with the support and assistance of the international community will a stable Libya pull through.

The Maldives believes that the single most important issue concerning peace in the Middle East is the recognition of a Palestine State. We do not believe that there can be a meaningful dialogue without this acceptance of statehood. For 40 years, the ongoing peace process in the Middle East has been continually undermined by the very fact that it rests on an unequal power relationship. While this dynamic will not change until real peace is established, we as the United Nations have an obligation to level the playing field. We have an obligation to ensure that all elected Governments have representation that is equal to the mandate given by their people.

Furthermore, it is clear that Palestine has a Government that is capable of administering its country and an Administration that is ready to take on the full burden of governance. The only way forward, therefore, is through the international recognition of Palestine as a State with a view to Palestinians negotiating their own interests and concentrating on

developing their own socio-economic infrastructures while being at peace with Israel.

After 64 long years of inaction, the time to move forward is now. Let me conclude with an appeal from the people of the Maldives to support three generations of Palestinians who have lived their lives under the yoke of occupation. The Maldives strongly calls on all States, especially the members of the Security Council, to prevail against a history of failure and stand up for the dignity of these men and women by supporting a free and independent Palestinian State.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): First of all, on behalf of the Government of Malaysia, I wish to convey our condolences to the Government of Turkey at the tragic occurrence of the earthquake in Turkey yesterday. We also wish to offer our condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of the Crown Prince.

Let me now congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council.

Secondly, I wish to align my delegation with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statement to be delivered by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

For more than half a century, the international community has yearned for a peaceful and just solution of the Palestinian issue. Decades of strife and politico-legal arguments have made the quest for a solution ever more elusive. The United Nations, including the Security Council, has churned out over 180 resolutions on Palestine, at last count. However, we are still grappling with this task today, as no tangible outcome has been produced. That is partly due to our inability to bring into effect the very resolutions that we have adopted at all levels of this Organization.

Malaysia fully endorses the application of Palestine to become a Member of the United Nations, as we feel deeply for the people of Palestine, whose forefathers inhabited the land for virtually the last two millennia. All of us have to support Palestine in exercising its natural and inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, in the establishment of

an independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

This support is in accordance with the two-State solution and takes into account the security concerns of both parties. In the light of the fact that more than two thirds of the States Members of the United Nations have recognized the State of Palestine, we call on the Security Council to expedite this application at the earliest opportunity. The Security Council has the moral, political and legal responsibility to ensure that Palestine is admitted as a Member of the United Nations without further delay. There is no reason for the Council not to do so.

In addition, we call on Israel to immediately fulfil all of its obligations, including refraining from provocation. The recent Israeli settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are deplorable and are illegal under international law. Such provocative acts have put the two-State solution in jeopardy. We therefore call on Israel to fulfil its international obligations by completely stopping its settlement activities and to abrogate all policies and practices that contravene international law and minimum standards of internationally accepted basic human rights, including the immediate lifting of the unlawful blockade of Gaza.

Although the recent agreement between Israel and Palestine for the swap of over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners is a step towards achieving peace, we should not forget that 5,000 Palestinian civilian prisoners, including children, women and elected officials, are still imprisoned or arbitrarily detained by Israel. Even more worrying are the extremely poor, undignified and, in some cases, life-threatening conditions under which the Palestinian prisoners are being detained in Israeli prisons and detention centres.

Malaysia calls on Israel to stop this mistreatment of Palestinians and to observe appropriate standards related to the treatment of prisoners. Further, we also call for the release of all Palestinian prisoners, as such release is essential for creating a climate of mutual trust, which is necessary for the resumption of permanent status negotiations.

Resolving the issue of Palestine requires the international community to focus all its energy and efforts on achieving a comprehensive peace in the region and restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an

independent State of Palestine. All parties must act truthfully and sincerely towards achieving these objectives.

We again urge the Security Council to take necessary measures, failing which would put the Council's credibility as the principal organ responsible for international peace and security at risk. Now is the time for peace, and we should not let this opportunity go to waste.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): Allow me at the outset to express heartfelt sympathies and condolences on behalf of the people and the Government of Japan to the people and the Government of Turkey for the tremendous losses and damage caused by the earthquake. Japan is ready to extend as much assistance as possible for the recovery and reconstruction of Turkey, in cooperation with the international community.

I would also like to convey the deepest condolences of the people and the Government of Japan to the people and the Government of Saudi Arabia on the sad demise of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia.

Japan fully understands the earnest aspiration of Palestinians to build their own State and strongly supports a two-State solution under which Israel and a Palestinian State would live side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. Japan supports the vision that under a two-State solution the borders should be defined through negotiations, based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed swaps, in a way that will achieve the peaceful coexistence of a viable Palestinian State and Israel with secure and recognized borders.

Through a two-State solution, the Palestinian people will exercise their right to establish an independent State; Israel will enjoy a greatly enhanced security environment; and both parties will be able to launch full-fledged efforts at cooperation for their mutual prosperity.

A two-State solution can be achieved only through sincere negotiations between the parties concerned. Japan has consistently encouraged both sides to resume direct negotiations, in cooperation with the efforts of the international community. In this connection, Japan strongly supports the Quartet's 23 September statement, including the timetable it sets

out, and pays respect to the vigorous endeavours of the members of the Quartet. Japan welcomes the announcement that separate meetings will take place between Quartet members and the respective parties on 26 October in Jerusalem. We strongly expect that these meetings will be a step forward towards the resumption of direct negotiations.

Japan has been closely watching the discussions in the Council's Committee on the Admission of New Members.

Japan welcomes the recent agreement between Israel and Hamas for the release of Gilad Shalit and of the Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. We hope that this agreement will contribute to the building of confidence between the parties and lead to the early resumption of direct negotiations between them.

Japan does not recognize any measures that prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations and associates itself with the Quartet in calling on both sides to refrain from any provocative actions. Both parties must abide by their obligations under previous agreements, most importantly the Road Map.

Japan reiterates its strong call to Israel to fully freeze its settlement activities in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. In this connection, Japan deeply deplores the recent series of announcements by the Israeli Government of plans for construction of new housing units in East Jerusalem. At the same time, we call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to improve security and fulfil its commitments to cease violence and work against incitement.

Japan has been supporting the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to establish statehood and is committed to continuously providing assistance in that regard. Japan is also keenly following Palestinian efforts to establish a unified Government.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Abdou Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to offer my condolences to our colleague from Turkey and to the Turkish Government and people, who have been put to the test by the earthquake that struck a portion of that country. I also convey our sympathies to the Saudi people, who have just lost their Crown Prince.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is gratified to see you, Madame, assume the presidency of the Security Council for this month. Knowing the commitment of your country, Nigeria, to promoting the ideals of the United Nations, I should like to offer you my warm congratulations.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Nawaf Salam, Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, for the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the Council last month. I express my deep thanks to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his informative briefing.

The Committee remains firmly committed to the holding of political negotiations with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. However, such negotiations must begin on a sound foundation in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. To be frank, negotiation is not an end in itself. In particular connection with the region under discussion today, negotiation should lead to a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict if the protagonists are all willing to reach one. Our Committee therefore shares the frustration expressed here today in this forum with regard to the current stalemate in the peace process.

We are nevertheless encouraged by the renewed efforts of the Quartet to pave the way to constructive negotiations. In that connection, the statement of 23 September, in which the Quartet proposed a series of measures and a time frame that would make it possible to reach a lasting peace agreement by the end of next year, contains a number of positive elements, including a return to the 1967 borders with land swaps, as well as the minimum requirement of complete cessation of settlement construction and the dismantling of outposts. We hope that the Quartet and the parties will make good use of these principles and will apply them in practice, clearing the difficult path to the resumption of credible and productive negotiations.

While commending the visible efforts of the Quartet to return to serious talks, the Committee believes that, at this time of upheaval, it will be possible to consider a new series of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations only if the principles and other parameters

are generally agreed by the parties and guaranteed by the Quartet.

Although our Committee strongly supports the resumption of negotiations, we cannot lose sight of the considerable gap that exists between the political process and the situation on the ground. In fact, there have never been so many Jewish settlements on Palestinian land. Since the Council's most recent public debate on this issue (see S/PV.6590), Israel has approved the construction of 900 housing units in the Har Homa settlement and 1,100 at Gilo, without counting the disclosure in October of the plans for Givat Hamatos, a vast and entirely new settlement of 2,600 housing units in the city of Jerusalem. There are also 1,600 units at Ramat Shlomo, 277 at the Ariel settlement and 100 at Beit Aryeh. The Israeli Government has even created a new committee in order to legalize illicit settlements under Israeli law, while at the same time accelerating the demolition of housing units and the displacement of Palestinians, with 990 persons affected in the month of September alone.

Our Committee has echoed the international community's unanimous condemnation of the Israeli settlements. We must tirelessly recall that these settlements are contrary to the provisions of international law and the Road Map. They jeopardize the peace efforts and are a long-term threat to the bases of a two-State solution. The recent escalation in the coordinated campaign of provocation, desecration and violence carried out by extremist settlers must particularly be condemned. Unfortunately, the Israeli authorities are not responding to this campaign with the rigorous penalties appropriate to such incidents.

The Security Council and the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 should take firm and immediate measures to ensure that international law is respected and to prevent these iniquitous acts from further escalating the violence. It is high time to provide protection for Palestinian civilians against the twofold threat of the establishment of settlements on their land and the excessive violence of the colonists.

I am pleased to note that, since my last statement to the Council (see S/PV.6590), the Palestinian Authority has continued to carry out its programme of institution-building for a functioning State. The Committee has taken note of the request for the admission of Palestine to membership of the United

Nations, which the Security Council is currently considering. We call on the Council and the General Assembly to grant this request. The Committee also endorses President Abbas' call on the General Assembly to ask countries that have not yet done so to recognize the Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Furthermore, we express our serious concern over the situation of Palestinian political prisoners. Although the Committee welcomes the recent exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hamas, mediated by Egypt, the Committee calls for the release of all prisoners languishing in Israeli jails.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an extremely sensitive issue of great concern to tens of millions of people in the region and beyond. In the weeks and months to come, the international community should make greater efforts to resolve this issue, demonstrating its political courage and a heightened awareness of its responsibilities. There is a great deal at stake, but we cannot allow another failure. We urge the Council to take action on initiatives to achieve our common goal: the creation of two States living in peace and security within safe and internationally recognized borders. In that regard, I assure the Security Council of the Committee's full cooperation.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I thank you, Madame, for giving me the floor for the first time in my new capacity.

The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Albania; as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, let me express our deep condolences and sympathies to the people and Government of Turkey for the tragic loss of life in yesterday's earthquake, as well as to the people and Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

The events taking place throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa in the past months have taken

on truly historic proportions that will not only shape the future of the entire region, but also have repercussions far beyond the countries concerned. The fundamental changes witnessed across the Arab world have made the need for progress in the Middle East peace process all the more urgent. Recent events have indeed shown the necessity of heeding the legitimate aspirations of peoples in the region, including those of Palestinians for statehood and of Israelis for security.

The statements delivered by President Abbas and by Prime Minister Netanyahu at the United Nations a few weeks ago (see A/66/PV.19) were different in many ways, but they coincided in their shared expression of the need to return to negotiations, of support for a two-State solution and of desire for a peaceful and comprehensive resolution of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The European Union (EU) reiterates its appeal to the parties to resume negotiations under the terms, and within the timelines indicated in, the Quartet statement of 23 September. The European Union welcomes the positive statements of both parties in that regard. The European Union underlines the Quartet's crucial role in facilitating the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, and recalls its readiness to support all efforts to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. In that regard, the European Union reaffirms its clear positions with regard to parameters, principles and issues, including the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2009, December 2010, May 2011 and July 2011, as well as the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union at the Security Council on 21 April (see S/PV.6520). The European Union fully supports the Quartet's call on the parties to refrain from provocative actions and to respect the obligations of both parties under the Road Map.

The European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, hosted a meeting of the Middle East Quartet envoys on 9 October in Brussels to follow up on the 23 September Quartet statement. As a result of that meeting, both parties will be invited to another meeting with the Quartet envoys on 26 October in Jerusalem. At that meeting, an agenda for negotiations and working methods will be discussed.

The European Union deplores the recent Israeli decisions to advance settlement expansion in the Gilo

and Givat Hamatos settlements, which run counter to the Quartet's efforts. The European Union deplores steps to legalize, under Israeli law, houses in West Bank outposts. The European Union reiterates that settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. All settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, should cease immediately. New construction plans should be abandoned. The European Union also calls upon both sides to avoid steps that run counter to the Quartet's efforts to restart negotiations.

The European Union remains one of the major supporters and contributors to the Palestinian State-building efforts led by President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. The European Union welcomes the outcome of the reports stating that the Palestinian Authority is above the threshold for a functioning state in the key sectors studied by the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and that Palestinian institutions compare favourably with those in established States. The European Union expects the Palestinian Authority to continue its institution-building efforts and to uphold current standards in terms of transparent and efficient public finance management.

The European Union remains dedicated to continuing its support to the Palestinian Authority's successful State-building efforts. The current fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority risks putting in danger the achievements made so far in institution-building. The European Union therefore underlines the necessity of providing predictable and further support to the Palestinian Authority, and calls for equitable burden-sharing by the international donor community. The EU supports the organization of a new donor's conference in Paris, in the context of a relaunch of the peace process.

The European Union welcomes the release of Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit. His return home after five years of captivity puts an end to the long ordeal that he and his family have endured. The European Union hopes that his release and the related prisoner exchange will have a positive impact on the Middle East peace process, and encourages both sides to continue taking de-escalating steps.

The situation in the Gaza Strip remains of particular concern for the European Union. The crossings must be opened to allow for the flow of humanitarian aid, imports and exports of commercial goods and the movement of people between Gaza and the West Bank, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. The further dismantling of the restrictions on access and movement in the West Bank and Gaza is key for allowing for increased investments and the development of the economy and infrastructure. The European Union recalls its readiness to assist in the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza in close partnership with the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government, in line with resolution 1860 (2009) and on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

In conclusion, with regard to Syria, the European Union condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing brutal repression led by the Syrian regime against its population, as well as the widespread human rights violations, including the killing, mass arrest and torture of civilians, peaceful protesters and their relatives that may amount to crimes against humankind. It also condemns actions aimed at inciting inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflict, as well as recent targeted assassinations of renowned political figures such as Mashaal Tammo. According to the Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 3,000 people, including children, have died since the beginning of the unrest. The European Union deplores those deaths and expresses its condolences to the families of the victims. The European Union demands that the Syrian authorities put an immediate end to the violence in order to prevent further bloodshed. Those responsible for, or associated with, the repression must be held to account by the international community. President Al-Assad must step aside to allow a political transition to take place in Syria.

The European Union is deeply disappointed that the Security Council has not yet been able to adopt a resolution on the current developments in Syria, even after months of ongoing brutal abuses by President Al-Assad and his regime. The European Union will continue to press for strong United Nations action to increase international pressure, and urges all members of the Security Council to assume their responsibilities in relation to the situation in Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Le Hoai Trung (Viet Nam): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Madame President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

My delegation extends its deep condolences to the Government and people of Turkey and to the families of the victims of the earthquake that struck Turkey on Sunday. We also express our deep condolences to the Kingdom and people of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of their Crown Prince.

The Vietnamese delegation wishes to thank you, Madame President, for convening this important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, on United Nations Day. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

For more than 60 years the region of Middle East has seen many wars and much bloodshed. Millions of Palestinian people remain displaced from their homeland, live under dire circumstances due to the blockade and are subject to violent attack in many forms. The Palestinian people continue to be denied their fundamental and inalienable rights of self-determination, first and foremost among them the right to create an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

More than a decade ago when the General Assembly met in 1988 to consider the question of Palestine, the Palestinian side presented a plan to advance peace. New circumstances have created new hopes for a just and durable peace settlement in line with the legitimate interests of all parties. Palestine made difficult decisions and, in the words of President Mahmoud Abbas, "decided to adopt the path of relative justice" (A/66/PV.19). A clear illustration is the Palestinian agreement to establish the State of Palestine on only 22 per cent of the territory of historical Palestine.

However, the peace process soon reached a stalemate because Israel still refused to become engaged on issues buttressed by international law and

numerous United Nations resolutions, and intensified the building of settlements on the territory of the State of Palestine. While we recognize the legitimate concerns of all parties, we trust that the realities of the Middle East over the past six decades now show that those concerns should and can be promoted only in the framework of earnest negotiations covering all of the aforementioned issues.

Viet Nam closely follows developments related to the peace process in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, and strongly supports the struggle and rights of the Palestinian people and all efforts for peace in the region. Given the prolonged stalemate and the continued serious encroachment on the rights of the Palestinian people, and given the strength of the internationally recognized achievements of the Palestinian authorities and people in building their State, President Mahmoud Abbas, on behalf of the State and people of Palestine and in the exercise of their inalienable rights, has submitted the State of Palestine's application for full membership in the United Nations. Viet Nam supports the will of the State and people of Palestine.

Viet Nam also supports negotiations between the parties concerned and welcomes renewed efforts by the Quartet, the League of Arab States, countries of the region and the United Nations to help to promote Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues. We call for intensified efforts by the international community, in particular the Security Council and the Quartet, to address the current political and humanitarian crisis and to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map, which emphasize, among other things, the principle of land for peace and the right of all States in the region to live in peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of His

Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation. We also extend our condolences to Turkey in the wake of the recent earthquake, which exacted a heavy toll.

In his regular briefing this morning, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe underscored the growing suffering that the Palestinian people continue to endure as a result of the Israeli authorities' ongoing policies of aggression and occupation. The most serious issue is the Israeli Government's continued campaign to expand its illegal settlements in the heart of Palestinian cities and villages; its demolition, destruction and confiscation of Palestinian homes, properties and land; and its continued siege of the Gaza Strip. We condemn all of those dangerous Israeli practices, which have exacerbated the deteriorating humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people and caused them to hit rock bottom. Those practices have also been a direct reason for the failure of the peace negotiations thus far and the growing state of tension, frustration and instability in the region.

We warn that the continued disregard of the international community for such Israeli actions and unilateral measures will only encourage Israel to pursue its practices aimed at entrenching its occupation of Palestinian land and property. That is especially true of its actions in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, whereby it aims to change the city's demographic, historical and religious nature.

The United Arab Emirates demands that the international community, and especially the Security Council, fully assume their responsibilities now more than ever before. Those include the adoption of all necessary, serious and effective measures to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately cease all settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, nullify all illegal decisions and measures it has taken unilaterally in that regard, and urgently lift its siege of Gaza.

We hope that the international community will enhance the scope of the humanitarian, economic and financial aid offered to the Palestinian people and their National Authority so that they can overcome the great challenges they continue to face.

Today's meeting of the Security Council is of special political significance, as it is follows the

Palestinian Authority's request for the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations. The United Arab Emirates supports that historic request and entitlement of the Palestinian people, especially in view of the fact that the Palestinian Authority has fulfilled its obligations in establishing the institutions of Palestinian statehood, as recognized by the Quartet and other relevant international organizations.

The United Arab Emirates also hopes that the Council's deliberations will lead it to take the unanimous decision to recommend to the General Assembly the acceptance of the Palestinian application as soon as possible, and in a manner consistent with the positions of the vast majority of the world's countries, which have officially recognized an independent State of Palestine based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Madrid Peace Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the vision of the two-State solution, as stipulated by the General Assembly in its resolution 181 (II) partitioning Palestine into two States, as well as the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Accepting Palestine's request for admission as a full Member of the United Nations does not at all mean closing the door to the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations; rather, it would mean a positive step towards supporting efforts to soon resume peace negotiations.

The halt in the negotiations led by the Quartet is due primarily to Israel's failure to abide by the Quartet's work plan. Therefore, the urgent and unconditional resumption of those negotiations is contingent above all on making Israel fully and immediately cease all illegal settlement activity throughout the Palestinian territories, especially East Jerusalem. It will also require a commitment to a clear and specific time frame for those negotiations so as to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on the two-State solution.

We closely followed the most recent prisoner exchange between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. We welcome the efforts made by the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt in that regard. We demand that Israel immediately and unconditionally release the thousands of prisoners who continue to be held under dire and illegal conditions in Israeli prisons and detention

centres. We also stress the importance of the adoption by the international community of the concrete measures necessary to guarantee the protection of Palestinian civilians and ensure accountability for all illegal measures and flagrant violations committed by the occupying Power, in contravention of international humanitarian law and the rights of the Palestinian people.

In closing, we hope that the Security Council will not again hesitate to take the necessary firm measures, under its mandate and responsibilities, to support the efforts to revive a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. We support the statement made by His Excellency Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Since 1948, the date of the declaration of the Israeli State, the Palestinian people, humiliated and exploited by the occupying Power, have been expelled from their lands. Today, entire generations of Palestinian citizens continue to pay the high price of exile, alienation and the systematic undermining of their human rights.

The historic decision of the Palestinian authorities to request the Security Council to support its international recognition as a State with full rights in the United Nations is a claim for justice and reaffirmation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. The Government of the United States has launched a campaign to frustrate recognition of the Palestinian State, making it conditional on the relaunching of direct talks between Israel and Palestine, facilitated by the Quartet. In that way, it seeks to delay or to block the international historic demand calling for the establishment of that State.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela diplomatically recognized the Palestinian State on 27 April 2009. Palestine has all the international legal, political and moral criteria to qualify as a sovereign State, in line with international law. After so many

decades of delay, Palestine has established itself as a subject automatically by law in the international community. Through the building of an unjustifiable and racist wall, the imposition of neocolonial settlements, the brutal and ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip and institutionalized violence, Israel is blocking the paths towards a negotiated settlement between the parties.

The Government of Israel currently has in its prisons more than 6,000 prisoners, including more than 280 children, some less than 12 years old. We are dismayed that there are children among those deprived of liberty. That makes clear the inhuman nature of the Government of Israel and those who defend such practices. Such actions, aimed at changing the demographic composition, the nature and the configuration of the Palestinian territories, are in violation of international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Council and the United Nations.

The Government of Israel has long undermined the principles of the United Nations. International law prevents Israel from invoking conquest and colonization, calling it natural expansion. Therefore, Venezuela once again calls on the Security Council to take the necessary steps to ensure that the State of Israel respects all relevant resolutions and its obligations under international law.

Venezuela reiterates its full support for the recognition of the Palestinian State by the United Nations on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It also supports compensation and the consequent return to their homeland of 50 per cent of the Palestinian population who find themselves dispersed throughout the entire world, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

We pay tribute to the tireless efforts being made by the Government of President Bashar Al-Assad to preserve the unity, integrity and stability of his country, besieged by imperialism. The stability of Syria is fundamental to peace in the Middle East.

Venezuela reiterates the need for Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan, pursuant to resolution 498 (1981) and in respect of resolutions 242 (1968) and 348 (1974). We renew our call to the State of Israel to respect the sovereignty of Lebanon and to avoid further conflict such as took place in July 2006. Only through direct negotiations between the parties,

under the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), can constructive solutions be achieved.

There is no excuse for the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their own lands, the frequent indiscriminate bombardment of Lebanon and the occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel. They are flagrant violations of the fundamental principles of humanitarian and international law, unparalleled in modern history.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nicolás Maduro Moros, said when he read out the message of the President of the Republic, Hugo Chávez Frías, before the General Assembly on 27 September:

“Venezuela hereby affirms its unconditional solidarity with the Palestinian people and its unlimited support for the Palestinian national cause, including, of course, the immediate admission of Palestine to the United Nations as a full Member State.” (A/66/PV.29)

It is time for the liberation of the Palestinian people, which will come about with the support of the peoples of the world. In his message, President Chávez optimistically predicted that Palestine will live and be victorious. We wish free, sovereign and independent Palestine a long life.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first to express my condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its people and Government on the passing of the Crown Prince. We would also like to convey our condolences and our solidarity to the people and Government of Turkey, who have been struck by the recent painful earthquake. Both countries are sister nations and neighbours of my country, and all that happens in either country also affects us as if it were happening in Syria. The opposite is also true.

My delegation wishes to express its great appreciation to you, Madame President, for having convened this open meeting to address the situation in the Middle East. This is an important topic, which we debate with the aim of putting an end to Israel's occupation of the Arab territories and its aggressive, inhumane and systematic violations of the rights of those who live there, in contravention of international law and international humanitarian and human rights

law. These practices continue with the full knowledge of those who claim to protect those laws.

All of us here know that the item on the agenda today, "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", is primarily concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine, and not with other matters that do not fall within the historical definition of the item's title. Unfortunately, instead of merely focusing on the content and objective of this agenda item, attempts are made to introduce other, unrelated subjects in order to weaken the agenda item under discussion, silently ignore the question of Israel's commitment to ending its occupation of the occupied Arab territories, and minimize the importance of the application to the Council for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations. In this context, we note that the facts show that the events, crises and tensions in our region are closely linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Today's exercise arises from efforts to lessen the international political and diplomatic pressure on Israel and certain countries that oppose Palestine's just demands — supported unanimously by the international community — seeking first and foremost the creation of a Palestinian State and an end to the settlement activities. Some countries are attempting to destabilize the region, which would lead to regional war and have a catastrophic effect on all the States of the region, without exception.

How can they do this? The answer is simple. They are inciting various Arab States against one another, under varying pretexts. They are also attempting to change the reality of the Arab world by opening up internal Arab fronts, which in the final analysis can serve only Israel's interests. And in regard to the so-called Arab Spring, the question we should ask is how we can reconcile the beauty of the notion of spring with the bloodshed, war, aggression, hostilities and interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Is this the definition of spring?

We meet today at an important moment in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is unacceptable and incomprehensible that the Security Council should remain idle in the face of Israel's inhumane and aggressive policies. In this context, the Council today has a significant opportunity to prove that it can play its part, as set forth in the Charter, by accepting the just and internationally supported request of Palestine; by

recognizing an independent Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and by granting it full membership of the United Nations according to international law developed within this Organization through nearly 1,000 resolutions.

Along with implementing policies that are contrary to international law, Israel, the occupying Power, refuses to return the occupied Syrian Golan to Syria and refuses to respect the resolutions of international legitimacy adopted on this matter, especially resolution 497 (1981), which states that the annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan is null, void and illegal. Israel continues to practice terror and oppression against the Syrian authorities under occupation in the Golan. Furthermore, the occupying forces are waging an ongoing campaign to break the ties that link those within the Syrian Golan to their homeland by building the racist wall of separation east of Majdal Shams, in line with the new Israeli political and security policy to undermine any possibility of peace negotiations, including over the occupied Syrian Golan.

We have transmitted to the Secretary-General and the Council official complaints in this matter, calling on the United Nations, particularly the Council, to shoulder their responsibilities and take measures to compel Israel to immediately halt its blatant violations of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly resolution 497 (1981). Today, unfortunately, we reiterate that those calls have not been answered. We were again offended by the absence of any mention in the Under-Secretary-General's briefing of the occupied Syrian Golan.

The achievement of just, comprehensive and lasting peace can come only with Israel's full withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 borders and with the creation of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We must also address the matter of the Palestinian refugees, as stated in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. We cannot have partial, phased or delayed solutions to this question. Peace in the region is at a dark impasse due to the arrogance of Israel, supported by the United States and certain European nations that provide unlimited support. This has created a deep sense of frustration and anger among the Arab and Palestinian peoples.

The only obstacle to peace in the region is Israel, and Israeli officials admit this themselves. One example among many are the remarks by Major General Uri Saguy, former head of military intelligence, who took part in the 2000 Shepherdstown talks organized by Bill Clinton, in his recently published book *The Frozen Hand: Why Israel Fears Peace with Syria More Than War*. Mr. Saguy contends that Israel has done everything it could to destroy any settlement with Syria, and that former Prime Minister Ehud Barak aborted the peace process with Syria. We all know that President Clinton addressed this topic in his memoirs, revealing Israel's responsibility for the failure of the negotiations with Syria.

We are very concerned and regretful when we see certain permanent representatives speak on the subject of the Middle East and my country's situation with similar animosity and provocativeness, calling for an uprising against our country's legal Government so as to foment chaos and destabilization and manipulate our people's destiny. We find it strange that those countries that falsely proclaim their desire for Syria's security and stability refuse to encourage national dialogue or serious ongoing comprehensive international reforms in Syria within six months. Along those lines, we would note that to follow up the recent comprehensive reforms in Syria, in recent days my country has established a committee to draft a new, advanced and modern constitution that will reflect the aspirations of the Syrian people. In a few days, a preparatory commission on national dialogue will be established by presidential decree. It will be presided over by Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad himself.

While my delegation will not use this opportunity to reply to statements made by some colleagues, we are nevertheless convinced that today's agenda item has nothing to do with their manipulation and manoeuvres, whose aim is merely to distract attention from the tension resulting from Israel's continued occupation of territories in Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. While the world turns a blind eye to the daily crimes of settlement activities and the violation of law and hundreds of Security Council resolutions, my country strongly condemns the diplomatically inappropriate comments made by the observer of the European Union and a number of other speakers on the subject of my country and its political leadership.

My country respects the principles and ideals of the United Nations and its role as a legal point of

reference. We will therefore abstain from responding to the comments to which I have referred, which are beyond the realm of political, diplomatic and courteous convention and violate the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States. My delegation will not proceed in that manner against representatives who have judged or criticized our country or characterized the regime in negative terms. Out of respect for our colleagues and for the Security Council, we would prefer to proceed in keeping with appropriate diplomatic and political language.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mrs. Smith (Norway): A debate on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question on United Nations Day, 24 October, is highly symbolic. The bid for Palestinian statehood goes back to the United Nations partition plan of 1947, and even further. In 1949, Norway voted in favour of admitting Israel as a Member State of the United Nations. At the time, we based our decision on the declarations and explanations provided by Israel. Israel had persuasively explained why recognition and membership should not await the resolution of the outstanding final status issues.

Since then, Norwegian policy has been based on the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Norway therefore stands ready to recognize a Palestinian State. Meanwhile, we support all international efforts leading to a comprehensive agreement on the outstanding final status issues, including the recent efforts of the Middle East Quartet to resume substantive talks between the two parties.

Norway has consistently stood by Israel and its inherent right to self-defence in accordance with international law. We have also supported the Palestinian right to statehood and the building of the Palestinian Authority.

At its last meeting in September, the donor support group for the Palestinian Authority affirmed the success of Palestinian institution-building. The performance of Palestinian public institutions was scrutinized by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations. Their joint conclusion was that the Palestinians were fully capable of running a State. Prime Minister Fayyad has

succeeded in what he promised two years ago, namely, establishing the necessary institutional foundation for achieving international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

In September, President Abbas reiterated before the General Assembly the need to resolve the final status issues through negotiations (see A/66/PV.19). Moreover, he ensured the General Assembly of the Palestinian Authority's commitment to comply with the Charter of the United Nations, relevant United Nations resolutions, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

We take note of the Palestinian application for United Nations membership, which the Security Council is now considering. We await the result of the Council's deliberations. If, in due course, the Palestinian authorities decide to go before the General Assembly, Norway will consider all legitimate demands put forward. The recognition of statehood and accession to United Nations membership are issues that are best addressed in the main United Nations bodies here in New York.

A main obstacle to an effective Palestinian State and full institution-building remains the occupation and the continued building of Israeli settlements on the occupied land. Norway is deeply concerned by the grave effects on peace and security of recent plans such as those for Mordot Gilo and Givat Hamatos, as well as other planned settlement expansions. Such measures are rapidly changing the territories around Jerusalem, in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. They undermine negotiations and may soon render the two-State vision unattainable. The Secretary-General, the General Assembly and the International Court of Justice have all rejected the legality of such unilateral actions.

Norway welcomes the agreement on the release of Gilad Shalit and the exchange of prisoners. The family's long wait is now over. Norway's position all along has been that Shalit's imprisonment was unacceptable, and we have been among the countries actively working for his release. We expect that agreement to have implications for the situation in the West Bank and Gaza over the next few weeks.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco, I wish to extend our deep condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on its loss of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. Our deepest condolences and sympathy also go to Turkey following the earthquake that occurred there yesterday.

We extend our gratitude to the President of the Council for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We also thank Mr. Lynn Pasco for his valuable and comprehensive briefing.

Morocco aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt, Kazakhstan and Qatar on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Group of Arab States, respectively.

Today's meeting is taking place only a few weeks after Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas delivered his historic address at the General Assembly (see A/65/PV.19), in which he requested the full membership of the State of Palestine in the United Nations, including recognition of its sovereignty on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Based on our belief in justice and legality as they relate to the question of Palestine — as we stated during this year's general debate (see A/66/PV.25) — my country renews its determination to fully and effectively support the request made by the Palestinian leadership on behalf of the Palestinian people. We hope that the current Security Council consultations on this issue will culminate in the prompt achievement of that goal, especially considering that there is universal consensus on the two-State solution — the States of Palestine and Israel — as well as recognition by many international organizations, especially by this Organization, that the Palestinian institutions and infrastructure are prepared to shoulder the responsibilities of an independent State.

The Palestinian question is at a historic and crucial crossroads, which requires the international community to act responsibly in order to achieve the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people. The impasse in this long peace process does not bode well. It could have a negative and adverse impact on peace and security in the whole region.

That deadlock is the inevitable natural outcome of the policies of force, intransigence and imposition of

the status quo pursued by the occupying Power. Instead of dealing in a positive way with the plethora of international initiatives to revive the peace process, the Israeli authorities have intensified their efforts to change the demographic composition of the occupied territories by intensifying their settlement activities, arbitrary arrests, home demolitions and displacement of Palestinian people — including the confiscation of their property, their collective punishment and the excessive use of force against them. The most recent chapter in this devious scheme was Israel's declaration, on 14 October, authorizing the construction of 2,610 new illegal Jewish housing units in East Jerusalem, in an attempt to fragment the new Palestinian State and isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

Like the Secretary-General, we are deeply concerned about this dangerous and illegal escalation, which runs counter to all international laws, instruments and norms. As Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, along with the Kingdom of Morocco, strongly condemns all attempts to alter the demographic composition of East Jerusalem and change its religious, cultural and historic character.

The Security Council has reiterated time and again that all unilateral actions taken by Israel in East Jerusalem and the other occupied Palestinian territories are illegal. It is time that the Council implements its own resolutions and puts an end to such Israeli practices. The international community, including the United Nations, has the responsibility to take immediate action in accordance with its legal, political and ethical obligations vis-à-vis the Palestinian people, in order to allow them to enjoy their full, legitimate rights. In that connection, we support regional, international and American Administration efforts, as well as those of the European Union, which, in the Quartet statement of 23 September, pledged to revive the peace process, within a specific time frame, as a last option and crucial hope and on the basis of international instruments and terms of reference, as well as United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace process, international law and the Quartet's own Road Map.

The Palestinian Authority and the international community have unquestionably acted with great responsibility and complete respect for negotiations as the basis for efforts to achieve a comprehensive and fair peace. We are convinced that the stability and

security of the entire Middle East is inextricably linked to the ability of Palestinians to exercise their political and legal rights. That includes the right to establish an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the withdrawal of Israel from all other territories occupied since 1967.

The Kingdom of Morocco enjoyed the trust of the international community in representing the African and Arab Groups when it was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 2012-2013. We will do everything in our power to enable the Palestinian people to regain their full rights, including to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as everything in our power to maintain stability and security for all areas and peoples of the Middle East, including Israel.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Ayebare (Uganda): Thank you, Madame President, for organizing this important debate and for presiding over the work of the Security Council this month. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

I wish to convey our deepest condolences and sympathies to the Government and people of Turkey on the loss of life and the destruction of property caused by yesterday's earthquake in eastern Turkey. We also convey our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

When a peace process becomes as long-drawn-out and protracted as has been the case with the Israeli-Palestinian question, there are times when the parties involved feel frustrated. It is essential for both parties to recommit themselves to the noble objective of reaching a durable solution.

In that regard, Uganda reiterates its call on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to muster the necessary courage to resume negotiations towards a peaceful settlement based on a two-State solution — Israel and Palestine living side by side peacefully and within secure borders.

We welcome the Quartet statement issued in New York on 23 September, in particular the six steps it proposes and the call on the parties to resume negotiations with a view to reaching a final agreement

by the end of 2012. Uganda encourages both Israel and Palestine to resume negotiations without further delay.

We also welcome the agreement reached on the exchange of prisoners, brokered by Egypt and Germany, which was announced by Israeli and Palestinian leaders on 11 October. We consider this as an important gesture that can foster greater cooperation.

The continuation of settlement activity, or any other actions that can hamper progress, should be avoided.

On the situation in Gaza, we remain concerned about the dire humanitarian conditions and we reiterate our call for a complete lifting of the blockade on Gaza.

Finally, at this critical juncture, it is important for the Israeli and Palestinian parties, with the support of the international community, to step up their efforts towards the attainment of a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to congratulate you, Madame President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

We express our deep condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for their losses from the earthquake. We likewise express profound condolences to the people and Government of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of His Highness the Crown Prince.

Cuba associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

It is regrettable that there continues to be no progress in the situation in the Middle East region, in particular with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. The region is still marked by instability and insecurity. The illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the main obstacle to reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the region.

Cuba demands the immediate cessation of the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, the settlement activities in Palestinian territory, the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of military force against the defenceless civilian population, and

the urgent, unconditional and full lifting of the cruel and illegal blockade of Gaza.

The ovation received by President Mahmoud Abbas's address to the General Assembly at its 16th plenary meeting, on 23 September (see A/66/PV.19), when he announced the presentation to the Secretary-General of a letter of request for Palestinian membership in the United Nations, is evidence of the support by the international community for the Palestinian cause and a recognition of its rights as a State. Cuba fully and strongly supports that request for full membership in the United Nations.

The Security Council must rule on this matter without further delay, and it must do so positively, as is the manifest wish of the overwhelming majority of the States Members of the United Nations.

As the Security Council continues its deliberations, the days go by and thousands of Palestinian political prisoners, including children, women and elected officials, suffer humiliations in Israeli prisons. Since 27 September last, thousands of Palestinian political prisoners have been on a hunger strike, protesting the deterioration of their conditions in detention and the actions of the occupying Power. Regrettably, the Israeli prison authorities have responded by taking additional punitive measures against the strikers.

The letters dated 10 October 2011 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2011/629) state that:

"Israel has continued its inhumane treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees via a series of illegal and harsh measures, such as collective punishment, which includes forcing them to live in unsanitary and unhygienic conditions; denial of health care; restrictions on family visits; solitary confinement for long periods of time, with some held in isolation for at least 10 years; deprivation of the prisoners' right to education; forced night-time searches of prisoners' cells; and denial of due process. In addition to such measures, in violation of the prisoners' basic human rights, the occupying Power continues to subject Palestinian prisoners and detainees to all forms of psychological and physical maltreatment, such as cuffing their feet and hands, measures of humiliation and intimidation,

forced interrogations and, in many cases, torture."

The international community, particularly the Security Council, cannot remain indifferent. The Council and the General Assembly must take practical measures to ensure that Israel puts an end to those policies, which are carried out deliberately, in violation of international humanitarian law and of human rights, including the Geneva Conventions.

Cuba reaffirms once again that all such measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, represent violations of international law and agreements and of the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations. Cuba demands Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Cuba reiterates once again its position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all peoples of the region of the Middle East that will put an end to the occupation of all Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and guarantee the exercise of the self-determination of the Palestinian people by establishing an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Ali (Bangladesh): Madam President, I should like to begin by thanking your country, Nigeria, and you personally for steering this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. At the outset, I express our sincere condolences at the demise of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. We also express our condolences at the loss of life and property in the recent earthquake in Turkey.

I convey our appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

The Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively. In addition, I wish to briefly make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

In order to achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, it is very important to address the key issue, which is the prolonged and illegal occupation of the Arab territories by Israel. We believe that the occupying Power should immediately cease its continued settlement activity, which remains the key blockage to the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

We commend President Mahmoud Abbas's leadership of the Palestinian Authority and the continued Palestinian State-building efforts, especially in the areas of governance, the rule of law and human rights, livelihoods, productive sectors, education and culture, health and so on.

We are concerned, however, at the destruction by the occupying Power of properties, homes and economic institutions, and the construction of the Wall, contrary to international law, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, which have hampered the already critical socio-economic situation that the Palestinian population faces. We are also worried because of the Israeli military operations and the continuing Israeli policy of closures and severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, including humanitarian personnel as well as food, medical, and other essential supplies, in the Gaza Strip, which are causing civilian casualties, and we therefore call for maximum restraint with respect for international humanitarian law.

We express our concern at the inhumane treatment of Palestinian prisoners languishing in Israeli jails. My delegation is pleased, however, at the recent Egyptian-brokered prisoner-exchange deal under which Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit has been released in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners.

My delegation believes that the Fourth Geneva Convention, the relevant General Assembly resolutions, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace and the Madrid Conference terms of reference, which guarantee Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories back to the line of 4 June 1967, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative are the best guides for achieving a two-State solution.

The principled support of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination from all

corners of the globe, both bilaterally and multilaterally, has been an essential pillar of Palestinian resilience over the decades. My delegation welcomes in this regard Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's speech of 23 September 2011 (see A/66/PV.19) before the General Assembly and his formal submission to the Secretary-General of an application for United Nations membership. It is also heartening to note that more than 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders. It would therefore be morally befitting for this body to unanimously respect the will of the majority of the Member States and to endorse the application of Palestine.

Let me now turn to the situations in Lebanon and in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. We call upon the concerned parties to fully respect the sovereignty of Lebanon and to cease continuous breaches of resolution 1701 (2006). We further demand that the occupying State immediately halt its actions to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights in accordance with resolution 497 (1981).

In conclusion, let me reiterate the long-standing position of Bangladesh that the continued illegal occupation of Palestine over the past six decades is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. Let me also reiterate our full support for a lasting peace for all inhabitants of the region, both Arabs and Israelis, and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with all its neighbours.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): Let me first turn to the situation in Syria and Yemen before discussing the question of Palestine.

With regard to Syria, we were very disappointed by the veto on the draft resolution presented to the Council earlier this month (see S/PV.6627). We are concerned that the use of the veto in such cases is not conducive to peace and security in the region. On the contrary, it can further undermine international efforts while the situation continues to deteriorate. We call upon the Council to revisit the situation in Syria as soon as possible.

With regard to Yemen, we welcome the Council's adoption of resolution 2014 (2001) last Friday (see S/PV.6634). Iceland strongly supports the condemnation of human rights abuses and calls for the end of violence. We also welcome the Council's reference to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security. We urge the Government of Yemen to implement the resolution in full.

The Security Council has found itself at the centre stage of the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by having been entrusted with the application of Palestine for membership in the United Nations. The Council's deliberations on the application take place in an environment where peace negotiations, which have been ongoing for almost two decades, are at a standstill with no tangible results. We speak of an environment in which there is not a viable plan in sight that might draw the parties back to the negotiating table and in which the current situation is unsustainable, because an occupation is inherently unsustainable.

At the same time, under the difficult circumstances of the occupation, the Palestinian National Authority has successfully implemented its economic and development programme and has now demonstrated clearly, by improving infrastructure and through institution-building, that Palestine can stand on its own feet. Their efforts and accomplishment have been applauded by the international community, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In July, Iceland informed the Council of its intention to support the Palestinians should they decide to bring their case to the United Nations. In his statement during the general debate in September, the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs informed the General Assembly of the determination of the Icelandic Government to fully recognize Palestine (see A/66/PV.26). I am pleased to inform the Council that the Government of Iceland has taken steps at the domestic level towards the recognition of Palestine by putting forward a proposal for a parliamentary resolution on the recognition of Palestine as an independent and sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders. That proposal is currently being discussed by the Foreign Relations Committee of our Parliament.

As many others have said before us, we see no contradiction between Palestine seeking membership in

the United Nations and the Quartet-led peace process, which we fully support. Let me reiterate Iceland's position that it is of the utmost importance that a negotiated agreement should be based on the two-State solution, where both parties can live in peace with their neighbours.

Iceland urges the members of the Council to contribute to the realization of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people by recommending to the General Assembly that Palestine be accepted as the 194th State Member of the United Nations. That would allow Palestine to follow in the footsteps of the numerous other Member States that owe their freedom and independence from colonialism to this very Organization and to the determination of many of its Members to ensure that the principles on which the Organization was established override other interests.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Tarar: (Pakistan): Thank you, Madame President, for convening today's debate. We also extend our compliments to the delegation of Nigeria for its able leadership of the Security Council.

We express our deepest condolences and sympathies to Turkey on the human and material toll exacted by the earthquake.

We mourn the passing of His Royal Highness Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Crown Prince, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered by the Permanent Representatives of Egypt and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

Precisely one month after the general debate, during which our top leaders reiterated their collective objective of finding a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, today's meeting of the Council comes amidst renewed hope for lasting peace in the region. The impressive march of the Palestinian people towards statehood has reached an important milestone with the application for United Nations membership. We hope that the Security Council will conclude favourably its deliberations on Palestine's application. Affirmative action by the Security Council and by the General Assembly will set the foundation for a lasting

solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It will be a step towards rectifying the historical injustices suffered by the Palestinian people.

The agreement reached between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities on prisoners also bodes well for prospects for peace. We felicitate the families of all prisoners released as a result of that agreement, which proves the all disputes and differences can be resolved amicably through negotiations. It is our sincere hope that the agreement will not only lead to the release of more Palestinian prisoners but that it will also reinforce the value of finding mutually acceptable compromises.

For lasting peace in the region, it is incumbent upon the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet to honour their longstanding commitments to a final settlement and to work in tandem to achieve that goal. The Quartet's statement of 23 September was positive in intent. However, the Quartet's initiative was neutralized by the Israeli decision to build new settlements in the occupied territories. This is cause for serious concern. Settlement activity is a clear violation of international law and a manifestation of Israel's expansionist policy. Settlement activity and the peace process are mutually exclusive. We call upon the Israeli authorities to cease new settlement activity unconditionally to help resume peace negotiations. We also call for an easement in the blockade of Gaza.

I conclude by reiterating our support for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations. Only a strong State of Palestine as a responsible member of the international community can guarantee peace for itself and for its neighbours.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers to commend you, Madam President, for convening this important debate. Let me also express my sincere condolences to the Government of Saudi Arabia on the tragic passing away of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

The delegation of Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This is a timely opportunity to focus on the situation in the Middle East, particularly the question of Palestine, a question that has occupied the attention

of the Security Council for a long time. The developments since our last opportunity to discuss the issue are particularly important.

A peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue will be one of the defining achievements of this century. It will reflect our collective will and responsibility to help resolve a question that has occupied the attention of this Council and the United Nations system for several decades.

While the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine remains a laudable goal for the United Nations, it is an existential necessity for the Palestinian people.

Sri Lanka's position with regard to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people remains consistent. We hope that the application for admission of the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations will receive sympathetic consideration.

Sri Lanka has consistently supported a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue and called for the implementation of General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution. Our sincere wish is that Israel, Palestine and their neighbours coexist in peace and harmony. Realizing the two-State solution would be the greatest investment in peace in the region in our time.

Sri Lanka has called upon all parties to ensure a climate conducive to finding a way forward towards the two-State solution, which is the only sustainable solution. The key players in the Middle East peace process have called upon all parties to scrupulously meet their obligations under the peace agreement.

The resolution of the issue of Palestinian political prisoners in Israel is critical to a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and as a confidence-building measure. Sri Lanka welcomes the recent exchange of prisoners between the two parties. It is a measure that will generate positive momentum for peace talks.

My Government is pleased to note the several important developments that have occurred on the ground in the midst of continued international efforts to create conditions for the early resumption of negotiations by Israel and Palestine. Palestine has been successfully striving to complete its State-building programme, which has been endorsed by the

International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations and others, as well as by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels in June and in New York in September. There has been internal reconciliation between the relevant local political stakeholders, who have united to pursue their common aspirations.

It is our sincere hope that the issues before the Council today will be addressed in a just and equitable manner that will encourage the search for peace. I take this opportunity to commend the work that has been carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for all these years amid many odds, to assist millions of Palestinian people in need, especially the people of Gaza.

Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinians quest for their legitimate human and national rights. The Government and the people of Sri Lanka would like to reassure the Council of our continued support and solidarity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Khan (Indonesia): First of all, I would like to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Turkey in the aftermath of the severe earthquake that hit the eastern part of their country. Our condolences also go to the Government of Saudi Arabia upon the passing of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, who died last Saturday.

We further express our deep appreciation to you, Madam President, and other members of the Security Council for arranging this debate at this critical moment in the history of the struggle of the Palestinian people. We are grateful also to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his comprehensive briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement to be made by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

On 23 September 2011, President Mahmoud Abbas submitted to the Secretary-General an application for membership in the United Nations. Without a doubt, it was a historic occasion. Indonesia

is proud to have stood by the people of Palestine and to continue to stand by them. Indonesia continues to be an unrepentant advocate of the Palestinian cause because it is the right thing to do. We call upon this Council to expedite the process and issue its recommendation without delay.

Indonesia supports the resumption of negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as proposed by the Quartet on 23 September. That means resumption of direct bilateral negotiations without delay or preconditions. There must be a preparatory meeting between the parties to determine the agenda and the method to be adopted for the negotiations, as well as an agreement on a timeframe that will not extend beyond the end of 2012.

We wish to express our appreciation to those Member States who have thrown their support behind the Palestinian bid for membership, including members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the OIC. We do not think it is sufficient for anyone simply to express bland support for the two-State vision, while failing to provide practical support for the Palestinian need to obtain what is justly theirs.

Regrettably, the Government of Israel continues its diplomatic offensive designed to frustrate the progress of Palestinians. The objective of this offensive is really to perpetuate the absence of a peace process.

Palestinian membership of the United Nations is not in contradiction with the two-State solution, nor does it constitute an obstacle to peace. The true obstacle to peace lies in the same failed policies of the Government of Israel, beginning with its settlement activities.

We support the recent release of political prisoners by the parties, which we hope will lead to the resumption of the peace process. It is distressing that since the Israeli occupation began in 1967, at least 750,000 Palestinian civilians, including women, children and elected officials, have been detained and imprisoned by Israel. We draw attention, in this regard, to last May's Declaration on Palestinian Political Prisoners adopted by the sixteenth Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Bali, Indonesia, in which the Movement called for urgent attention to be paid to the grave situation of these prisoners. We look forward to their being set free.

Finally, Indonesia reiterates its fundamental support for Palestine as well as the two-State solution. We look forward to the resumption of the peace process without unnecessary delay.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Sin Son Ho (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Let me begin by joining with previous speakers in expressing deep condolences and sympathy to the victims of the powerful earthquake in Turkey and their families. My delegation also takes this opportunity to express deep condolences for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Aviation, and Inspector General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, my delegation has received the sad news from the Pakistani Mission on the passing of Nusrat Bhutto, former Chairperson of the Pakistan's People Party, Government minister and the mother of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. In this regard, my delegation expresses its deep condolences.

It is my honour to speak before the Security Council with regard to the Palestinian question. I wish to thank the Nigerian delegation for its timely convening of this important meeting of the Security Council. Allow me also to associate myself with the statement made by Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

More than 60 years have passed since the international community launched its efforts to settle the Palestinian and Middle East problem, which was set off by Israeli occupation of the Arab territories in 1948. Nevertheless, no significant progress has yet been made. The Palestinian lands and other Arab territories remain under Israel's military occupation. The use of armed force, the expansion of settlements and the blockade of the Gaza Strip continue to prevail. This reality urgently requires the international community to find the earliest possible solution to the Middle East problem. The core element here is the solution of the Palestinian question as soon as possible. There can be no lasting peace and security in the Middle East and the Arab world unless the Palestine issue is completely resolved.

On 23 September, during the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, President Abbas of Palestine formally submitted an application for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations. This event of great significance received overwhelming support from the international community.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea officially recognized Palestine as a State in 1988, and since then has extended unreserved support and solidarity to the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is fully committed to standing firmly with the Palestinian and Arab people in their struggle for their just cause until their final victory and the problem's final solution. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea unreservedly supports Palestine's full membership of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mrs. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): I have the pleasure to deliver the following statement on behalf of the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in my country's capacity as Chair of the 57-member OIC group.

At the outset, I should like to express to Turkey our sympathy and deepest condolences over the devastating earthquake that struck the country on Sunday, killing residents and causing widespread damage. Let me also extend our shared sorrow to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the demise of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation. He was known not only for his outstanding service to his nation, but equally for his remarkable role in supporting the progress of Islamic solidarity.

The Palestinian question remains a defining issue of global justice and a pressing challenge for the international community, and the Security Council in particular. It is upsetting and painful to watch the Palestinian people as they continue to await the transformation of the long-standing political commitments and resolutions of the Security Council into actual practice, which would inspire hope and confidence in support for rightful causes and in defence of the values and principles for which the United Nations Organization was found.

Our debate today is of extraordinary importance, given that it coincides with world awareness of and attention focused on the Security Council's expected decision on the Palestinian bid for membership of the United Nations. At such a defining time in history as the Palestinian bid is being considered, we cannot fail to take this opportunity to appeal to this forum to reach the constructive and positive decision we are hoping for. Such a decision, once made, will be a secure foundation thereafter for the preservation of peace, security and justice, and enhance the opportunity for a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, based on the two-State solution.

It has become very clear that Palestine's resort to the United Nations to gain its rights as a recognized State does not negate the Palestinians' firm commitment to resolving the conflict through peaceful means. Rather, it confirms the principled peaceful approach that has been repeatedly and clearly emphasized by the Palestinian President, including at his most recent speech to the General Assembly (see A/66/PV.19).

The OIC group aspires to justice and equality in respect of the rightful cause of Palestine. It also remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must actively contribute to, proclaim and materialize the Palestinians' inalienable rights, including the rights of return and self-determination, as well as their legitimate national aspirations to freedom, prosperity, peace and justice in their independent, sovereign State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The OIC also joins the international community position in reaffirming that all measures and actions taken by Israel to alter the legal and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, and to impose jurisdiction and administration there, have no legal basis. The OIC reiterates its demand that Israel abide fully and immediately by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, as also reflected in resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Amidst the efforts undertaken by international actors to revive a credible political process, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to commit violations, undertake unilateral actions and impose unlawful policies in the West Bank. Likewise, the OIC remains

deeply concerned over the situation in East Jerusalem, where Israel persists in intensifying a systematic process of altering the historical Arab-Islamic identity of the holy city and changing its demographic composition. Such violations seek to completely change the realities on the ground and eventually isolate occupied East Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings.

Both in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, Israel continues to construct new settlement units, destroying houses, displacing and detaining Palestinians, confiscating lands and properties, building the apartheid wall, and carrying out excavations underneath the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. If left unchecked, those violations will certainly pose a threat to stability and security, heighten tensions, undermine the viability of the two-State solution and have far-reaching negative consequences on the life of the Palestinians. In that regard, the Security Council has a vital role to play in compelling Israel to abide by, and end its flagrant breaches of, international law.

The illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip remains in force, despite Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January 2009. Bearing that in mind, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) cannot accept any report that would either whitewash attacks on humanitarian convoys or condone the illegal blockade against Palestinian civilians. Accordingly, we call on the Security Council to take responsibility for putting an end to this illegal blockade on Gaza, for protecting justice and humanity and for preventing further human rights violations.

The imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, who are being held in 22 Israeli prisons and detention facilities and who launched a general hunger strike on 27 September, remind the world of one of the many injustices against the Palestinian people. In that regard, we demand that the Security Council shoulder its responsibilities in addressing the practices of the Israeli Government, which contradict the principles and laws of the international community, and in pressuring Israel to release Palestinian political prisoners without any preconditions. In that context, I would like to welcome the recent prisoner exchange.

The time has come to acknowledge and adopt a rightful and historic resolution that recognizes the independent State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, an action that would provide the cornerstone

for the establishment of stability, prosperity, peace and security for Palestine, Israel and other neighbouring countries of the region. We hope that the Quartet will succeed in implementing the Road Map in accordance with the agreed terms of reference, as reflected in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavours to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including the right of return, the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (spoke in Arabic): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Sir, for having convened this important meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We also wish to thank Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

We align ourselves with the statements made by Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Qatar on behalf of the Arab Group. The eyes of the international community are now focused on the Security Council and whether it will take a historic stand on the Palestinian request for full membership in the United Nations. That request was made after a long delay and with due entitlement, particularly since more than 130 countries, representing a majority of two thirds of the Member States, already recognize the Palestinian State.

The peoples and the States of the region have high hopes that the international community, in general, and the Security Council, in particular, will assume their political, legal and moral responsibilities in supporting Palestine's request for membership in the United Nations. They also hope that rights will be restored to their owners and that the Palestinian people will realize their right to self-determination and their legitimate aspiration to have a sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the framework of the 4 June 1967 borders and in accordance with internationally legitimate resolutions, in particular the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Needless to say, that there is one party that pays no attention to international legitimacy, nor does it heed the resolutions of the Security Council, or international or humanitarian laws. While the entire world is demanding that the parties return to the negotiating table and halt all provocative unilateral activities that undermine the chances of success in the peace process, Israel persists in its intransigence and arrogance, and continues its illegal and aggressive actions through an illegal expansionist settlement campaign. At the same time, it ignores all appeals by the family of nations to stop the settlement activity, revive the peace process and resume negotiations so as to achieve the two-State solution.

Perhaps the latest decision by the Israeli Government to build 1,100 new illegal settlement units on occupied Palestinian territories supplies further proof of Israel's arrogance and its lack of seriousness in reaching out towards the option of peace. In that regard, we would like to draw attention to the harassment being suffered by the Palestinians, including the elderly, children and women, at the hands of armed Israeli settlers, whose destructive hands have also reached houses of worship and destroyed mosques, farms and trees in the occupied territories. The State of Kuwait appeals to the international community not to stand idle in the face of the criminal Israeli actions that violate all international norms, agreements and instruments. We also call for providing the necessary protection for defenceless Palestinians in Palestinian territories.

While we welcome the recent release of a number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, we also demand the release of the remaining prisoners and detainees and call for the deployment of an international fact-finding mission to examine the conditions in Israeli jails and the extent to which Israel adheres to the rules of international law.

The blockade imposed on Gaza continues. There is no doubt that this represents another violation by Israel of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949. Instead of protecting Palestinian civilians, the occupation authorities subject them to collective punishment, which has exacerbated and led to the deterioration of the economic, social and humanitarian situations in the Gaza Strip. The frightening statistics resulting from this blockade are no longer surprising,

such as the unemployment rate, which stands at 65 per cent. We cannot ignore Israel's occasional air raids against populated Palestinian areas, an act that qualifies as terroristic and should be condemned.

My country renews its demand for Israel's compliance with Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which calls for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan and its withdrawal to the line of 4 June 1967. We emphasize that Israel's continued occupation of part of the territory of the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic poses a real obstacle to achieving peace and security in the Middle East.

In regard to the situation in Lebanon, the State of Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to stand beside the sisterly Republic of Lebanon and supports efforts to maintain its security and preserve the integrity of its territories. My country also demands that Israel immediately cease its continued violations of Lebanon's territory and air space and that it comply with Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and withdraw completely from Lebanese territory.

We would like to stress that the peoples and States of the region follow the meetings of the Security Council regarding the Palestinian request for full United Nations membership with great interest and hope. Given that all of the international initiatives, settlements and resolutions call for a two-State solution, we therefore appeal to the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and oblige Israel to halt its illegal settlement activities and to resume negotiations in order to achieve a two-State solution, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009), the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me at the beginning to express my gratitude to you, Madame President, for having convened this important meeting at a time of significant developments in the Middle East and the Muslim world.

Popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa demonstrate a pressing need for change. The aspiration of peoples to democracy, the rule of law and independence, as well as their affection for Islamic values, cannot simply be overruled. We believe that

addressing the legitimate demands of the people through a peaceful political process and away from foreign interventions is the only way out of crisis and to avoid violence.

The Palestinian bid to become a full member of the United Nations will soon come up for decision. For the past six decades, the Palestinian people have lived under the most severe pressure and atrocities of the Israeli regime. All negotiations with the occupying regime have so far proved futile, while the continued inaction of the Security Council has made the regime more audacious in pursuing its inhuman policies. In past decades, the veto power was used at least 46 times to defeat draft resolutions condemning Israel. The question is how to consolidate our efforts in order to secure the inalienable and inherent rights of the Palestinians, including their right of return, and to ensure the establishment of an independent and viable State in all the Palestinian territories and that the membership of Palestine, as a full-fledged State, is realized.

Last week's release of a noteworthy number of Palestinian prisoners brought a wave of joy to the occupied territories and among freedom-loving people of the world. Yet, there are disturbing reports on the worsening situation of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees being illegally imprisoned and detained by the Israeli regime, in violation of international law, including international humanitarian law. Hence, we should not forget that the conditions of the more than 6,000 Palestinian civilians, including at least 280 children and 38 women, as well as 22 elected officials, who continue to be imprisoned or arbitrarily detained by the Israeli regime. We hope that the efforts to secure the release of those prisoners would continue.

In addition to concerns about the deteriorating situation of Palestinian prisoners, we are disturbed by reports in recent weeks confirming the escalation of acts of violence and terrorism against Palestinian civilians and their properties in the occupied Palestinian territory perpetrated by illegal Israeli settlers, many of whom are armed. The burning of the Qusra mosque, the desecration of mosques in the Palestinian villages, the uprooting of trees, burning agricultural land and the constant harassment and humiliation of Palestinians, including children, on a daily basis are but a few examples of such a brutality by settlers. Such illegal actions by Israeli settlers occur in full view of the occupying forces, who take no

action to hold those settlers accountable for their crimes and continue to offer them impunity and protection while they carry out such crimes.

These examples constitute further confirmation of the dire situation that prevails in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which requires the international community's urgent attention. The Israeli regime must be held responsible for its illegal and provocative acts. The international community cannot continue to stand idly by as the Israeli regime continues to colonize the Palestinian territory, allowing its illegal settlers to rampage unbridled and to incrementally continue its violations of international law, thereby upholding its record of war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations.

With regard to the situation in Syria, my delegation wishes to emphasize that, taking into account the multi-ethnic Syrian society and the exceptional geopolitical situation of Syria, any foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of Syria and fomenting divisions and sectarian differences among the people would jeopardize peace and stability in the whole region. The people in Syria realize that the key to their independence and dignity is to keep their ranks united and to remain steadfast in their resistance and struggle against Israeli occupation and aggression.

On Lebanon, the Israeli regime has continued its violations of the land, sea and air space of Lebanon and refuses to withdraw from Lebanese occupied villages. Such occupations and acts of aggression should stop immediately.

Before concluding, I would like to react to the allegations against my country in the statement delivered this morning by the representative of the Israeli regime. It is no wonder that, by levelling baseless allegations with regard to terrorism and Iran's nuclear programme, the Zionist regime has preposterously attempted, once again, to misuse the main debate at this Chamber and to deflect attention from its long and dark catalogue of crimes and atrocities, such as occupation, aggression, militarism, State terrorism and crimes against humanity, as reflected in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48) and the report on the Marmara incident.

On the ridiculous accusation of the so-called plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador in Washington, it is very clear to us that that story has been ineptly

fabricated to implicate Iran. That is a pre-planned scenario, supported by the Israeli regime, on the assumption that the end is its main beneficiary. With more than 6,000 years of history and civilization, the Iranian nation has never engaged and will not engage in such a despicable attempt. Such an operation, if true in nature, could only be planned and carried out by such a regime, whose short history is full of assassinations of its opponents, even high-ranking officials of other States. So I do not even tax the patience of the members of the Council to delve into it and to respond to such baseless allegations made by the representative of such a criminal regime.

On the nuclear issue, I should say that the Israeli regime's clandestine development and unlawful possession of hundreds of nuclear warheads and a nuclear weapons arsenal are the only and single threat to regional and international peace and security. The Israeli regime has clearly defied the demand of the overwhelming majority of United Nations Member States that have, time and again, called on that regime to renounce nuclear weapons and to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Regrettably, the inaction of the relevant United Nations organs in dealing with such Israeli policies and practices has emboldened that dangerous regime. Indeed, peace and stability cannot be achieved in the Middle East, where the massive Israeli nuclear arsenal continues to threaten the region and beyond.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (spoke in Arabic): I thank you, Madame President, for convening this meeting. I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

At the outset, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the King, Government and people of our sister Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to the Arab and Muslim nations on the passing of His Royal Highness, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. I also offer my deep sympathies to sisterly Turkey and its people in the wake of the devastating earthquake there, which has claimed many lives and inflicted great material damage.

In every position it has taken on the Middle East, the Kingdom of Bahrain has supported all efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement of the Middle

East question on the basis of a two-State solution in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security, with Palestine guaranteed as a viable, independent State within the 1967 borders. We continue to play an active role on the Arab Peace Initiative Committee, believing it to be the best framework within which to achieve a peaceful settlement.

In his address to the General Assembly during the general debate, His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of Bahrain said that

"Today more than ever, the international community has a propitious opportunity to do justice to the brotherly Palestinian people and to help them to achieve their legitimate aspirations by recognizing an independent Palestinian State on their own national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That would put an end to an era of bitter Arab-Israeli conflict, contingent on a complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories to the lines of 4 June 1967 in Palestine, the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and the occupied territories in southern Lebanon, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative". (A/66/PV.15, p. 8)

It no longer makes sense to continue to address the Palestinian question in a routine manner. The international community must take a bolder step forward, not only in order to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people but, more importantly, to see justice done after so many decades of occupation and unilateral attempts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question. The whole world, and the Quartet in particular, has seen the Palestinian Authority make repeated concessions in its efforts to attain its inalienable and legitimate rights, chief among them the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, even as the international situation evolves within this Organization. However, the fine diplomacy and flexibility demonstrated has been greeted by nothing but more settlement and displacement activities, without regard for all the international resolutions prohibiting such activities.

I remind the Council of what we have already heard in previous meeting — the Palestinian Authority is capable of managing State affairs, as has been acknowledged by the World Bank, the International

Monetary Fund, and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The Palestinian Authority has proved its ability to establish sound institutions and provide security for a viable State. We pay tribute to President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for this achievement, whereby the Palestinian Authority has attained the goal it set itself two years ago. This should be considered when the Palestinian Authority's request for Palestine's full membership of the United Nations is being addressed. We therefore encourage the Organization, the Security Council and the international community to accede to their request.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you and your country, Madame President, on Nigeria's presidency this month and commend you on your excellent management of the Council's work. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing on the latest developments in the region.

I would like to express my deep condolences to the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. May he rest in peace. I would also like to extend my deep sympathies to the sisterly Republic of Turkey in the wake of the earthquake that has claimed hundreds of lives there.

I would also like to express our great gratitude to all those who have congratulated Tunisia and its people on the historic elections held in my country on 23 October, as well as our appreciation for the warm support they have offered us on their countries' behalf.

Tunisia associates itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Arab Group by the Permanent Representative of Qatar, as well as the statements made by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of the sisterly Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The international community finds itself once more at an important moment in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially with regard to the Palestinian cause. Despite the readiness shown by the Palestinian side to reinvigorate the peace process and work to reach appropriate and final solutions to the outstanding issues, we are once again seeing Israel set

up new obstacles that will undoubtedly hinder the resumption of negotiations and could undermine international efforts aimed at breaking a stalemate that has lasted too long and that may lead to the exacerbation of tension, frustration and violence in the region.

Here, we note Israel's recent unilateral actions, undertaken in complete disregard for and defiance of united international opinion and the efforts of influential and active parties in the peace process, especially those of the members of the Quartet, whose statement of 23 September (SG/2178) included a time frame for the resumption of dialogue and negotiations, and stressed the importance of both sides implementing their obligations under the Road Map. First and foremost of those is a complete halt to settlement activity.

Israel's unilateral actions include its announcement on 14 October of its intention to build 2,610 new housing units in Beit Safafa in East Jerusalem, destroying Palestinian homes, evicting their residents and leaving them homeless. Israel has already demolished 31 residences since the beginning of the year, leaving 106 Palestinians homeless, including 61 children. Israel's actions also include the ongoing Judaization of the holy city of Jerusalem and stripping it of its Arab and Islamic character, as well as the continuing isolation of Palestinian territories in order to create a fait accompli on the ground that suits Israel's interests and objectives. Those and other examples clearly reflect the Israeli occupation authorities' ongoing violations of international law and treaties, including the peace process terms of reference, the Road Map, the outcome of the Madrid Peace Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

On 14 October, the Secretary-General issued a statement (see SG/SM/13879) in which he expressed his deep concern over the continued settlement activity. He also renewed his call to end such activity and affirmed that any unilateral actions on the ground by Israel would not be recognized by the international community, but would be considered null and void and without legal effect, pursuant to the Road Map and the agreements that have been concluded.

During the morning part of this meeting, we heard clear and honest statements from delegations indicating that Israel could not continue its settlement activities. In addition, Tunisia strongly condemns the

ongoing unjust siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and the repeated acts of aggression carried out against it. We also condemn Israel's oppressive measures to limit the freedom of the Palestinian people and their rights to transportation, work, shelter, health and education. Their tragic suffering has been made worse by the current unjust policies of the Israeli occupation authorities.

Tunisia will maintain its principled and firm position in support of the efforts of the brotherly Palestinian people to achieve a just, permanent and comprehensive solution that ends the suffering of our Palestinian people, restores their national legitimate right to self-determination and establishes an independent sovereign State on their land, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Government and people of Tunisia strongly support the Palestinian application for full United Nations membership and consider that as a legitimate right based on firm historic, moral and objective foundations. Given the most fundamental rule of justice and its minimum requirement, a people have a right to regain freedom lost decades ago. Equally, they have the right to enjoy sovereignty over their own land.

It is also important that Palestine be granted full United Nations membership, as international and regional organizations and financial institutions have agreed that Palestine possesses the requisite elements of statehood in terms of administration and institutions and the ability to manage them. Tunisia therefore calls upon the members of the Council to support the legitimate request of Palestine.

Moreover, Tunisia steadfastly supports the principles of international legitimacy and peace. We therefore call for support for negotiations and dialogue to achieve peace. At the same time, we call for efforts to avoid a return to stalemate and tension, which would only threaten peace and security in the region and limit the prospects for the peace to which we all aspire.

As today's discussion has been on the Middle East, I renew my country's call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with international law, so that all of the peoples of the region can enjoy peace and security and focus their attention on development and on building a better future.

The Tunisian people have taken to the streets in neighbourhoods throughout the entire country before and after Palestine submitted its request for full United Nations membership. In addition, the interim Government has continued to clearly express its unconditional support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. I wish to reiterate here that this is a principled position that will not be changed, as it has emerged out of the Tunisian people's profound empathy for the just Palestinian cause, as well as out of our support for the cause of justice throughout the world.

In a symbolic gesture of great meaning, a blue chair — to recall the colour of the United Nations — was designated at the Palace of Conferences in Tunisia, where the media centre of the most recent elections was based. The following slogan was raised over the chair: "Palestine — a Member of the United Nations". We hope very soon to see a genuine seat for Palestine as a sovereign State in this important international Organization.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Osman (Sudan) (spoke in Arabic): First of all, I would like to express, to his country and to the Islamic Ummah alike, the deep condolences of the people and Government of the Sudan upon the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. Our sincere condolences go also to the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and to their families.

At the outset, my delegation aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We also wish to congratulate you, Madame President, for having convened this open debate on the Middle East and the occupied Palestinian territories at a time when the international community must, more than ever, support the choice of the Palestinian people and their just and legitimate demands — beginning with the creation of an independent State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital. The delegation of the Sudan supports the application of Palestine for full United Nations membership and urges Council members to support that legitimate request.

It is now time for the international community, represented by the United Nations and the Security

Council, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, to create two States as a practical solution to the conflict in the occupied territories. That is especially necessary given that neither international nor regional mediation efforts, nor those of the Quartet, have succeeded in resolving the conflict.

In the light of Israel's ongoing illegal and illegitimate settlement activities aimed at distorting the facts on the ground and imposing a status quo, the Security Council is aware of the fact that those activities have expanded to East Jerusalem, where more than 1,000 colonialist housing units have been built with impunity. Also in Jerusalem, the occupation authorities are depriving the Palestinian population of their housing, going so far as to deny them construction permits to rebuild. Moreover, the Holy City is under siege by virtue of a network of settlements that has resulted in its isolation from other Palestinian cities.

The Sudan strongly condemns any Israeli policy or practice that seeks to alter the demographic composition of occupied Palestinian territories. We call upon Council members to ensure that Israel abides by its commitments under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols, as well as all of the United Nations resolutions adopted since 1948. Israel has thus far ignored all of those measures. In that context, I wish in particular to mention resolution 1860 (2009) which, *inter alia*, stipulates that the two parties and the international community should make every possible effort to establish a just peace and to create two States within secure and recognized borders.

It is therefore time for the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate and just right to establish an independent State after 63 years of suffering deprivation. We must put an end to the tragedy of millions of exiled Palestinian refugees who should be able to live in a State that is a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

We welcome recent developments, including the prisoner exchange and the return of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees from Israeli prisons. We appreciate the efforts made by the sisterly country of Egypt in that regard. Still, we do not forget the fact that thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees remain in Israeli prisons.

In that context, we note the ministerial statement of the Non-Aligned Movement, issued last May in Bali, calling for the immediate release of Palestinian prisoners. We also point out that those prisoners include women and children. That should be a priority issue for the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

Finally, we recall resolution 1701 (2006), on Lebanon, and other relevant resolutions. We call on Israel to respect the provisions of those resolutions and to put an end to its continuing violations of and encroachment on Lebanon's sovereignty. We also condemn Israeli policies seeking to impose legislation and administrative structures on the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. In that context, we call on Israel to implement the Security Council's resolutions relating to the Golan, especially resolution 497 (1981), which calls for complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our deepest condolences to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and we ask God, in his everlasting mercy and forgiveness, to welcome him. We also express our condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for the earthquake that struck there recently.

I am honoured to address the Security Council on behalf of the Group of Arab States. I would like to congratulate you, Madame President, on your successful presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank you for convening this open debate and Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

Over the past decades, the Council has convened many meetings like today's, at which a large number of statements were made to confirm the importance of reaching a peaceful, just, comprehensive and sustainable solution to the Palestinian question and to achieve peace and stability in a region of great importance to international peace and security. However, the Palestinian question is still awaiting that solution, although we all know that it was proposed a long time ago and that it consists of the establishment of two independent States, living in peace side by side

on the basis of the 1967 borders, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map. It is time we did what we all know must be done.

More than 60 years ago in 1947, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 181 (II) on the establishment of two States in Palestine. Since then, however, Israel has only occupied more Palestinian and other Arab territories and continued to pursue repressive policies against the Palestinians, violate their inalienable rights and use excessive force against them. Despite all the efforts to hold peace talks and the support that the peace process has received, the outcome of that process remains hostage to the intransigence of the Israeli side, which has continued policies that do not express a sincere desire for peace, contradicting its claims to the contrary.

That is demonstrated by the insistence of the current Israeli Government on expanding illegal settlements in the West Bank, including building new housing units in East Jerusalem, knowing that those actions undermine the basic conditions for resuming genuine peace negotiations and that they constitute a challenge to the will of the international community, including resolutions of the Security Council.

At the same time, the Arab countries have shown a sincere desire for peace with Israel, as evidenced by the Arab Peace Initiative. The Initiative, however, has been met only with continued intransigence by successive Israeli Governments opposed to creating real conditions for a successful peace process. That pattern has led to several wasted opportunities, the most recent of which was the opportunity that arose last year after the resumption of direct peace talks between the two sides, strongly encouraged by the Government of the United States.

Today, we have a real opportunity to take a major step towards a practical solution for the Palestinian cause. It would require serious political will and the Security Council to assume its Charter responsibility for the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. The Arab Group hopes that the Palestinian demand for full membership in the United Nations, which was referred to the Council a month ago, finds support among all members of the Council and that Palestine will enjoy the Council's recommendation for full membership.

The Palestinian State has so far been formally recognized by more than 130 countries — the vast majority of States Members of this international Organization — and States continue to join the list every day. Member States are becoming aware that there is no choice but to realize the right of Palestinians to determine their own destiny and to live in dignity and security within the borders of their independent State, also given the fact that the institutions of the Palestinian Authority are ready to manage a viable State, as confirmed by relevant international organizations.

The Palestinian side has stressed that its application for membership does not necessarily mean closing the door to negotiations with the Israeli side. Indeed, we are anticipating the resumption of negotiations soon, in accordance with the call by the Quartet in its statement of 23 September (SG/2178). We underline again that the success of negotiations will hinge on putting a stop to the construction of settlements and to all repressive Israeli policies and practices towards the Palestinians, and on Israel lifting the unjust, inhumane and illegal siege imposed on the whole population of Gaza.

We stress our firm rejection of the illegal measures taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the Arab identity, demographic composition, legal status and religious character of the city. We stress that all such attempts are null and void and without legal effect. On the other hand, it is incumbent upon the Israeli authorities — who often speak of the need to address security and terrorism — to act to put an end to the crimes and terrorism perpetrated by some Israeli settlers, which have become intolerable.

Last week saw an agreement to exchange prisoners between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We call for the release of all remaining detainees languishing in Israeli jails, especially minors, women, the elderly and the ill.

One obstacle to sustainable peace in the Middle East that threatens stability in our region is Israel's nuclear policy and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and subject its nuclear facilities to international monitoring. The Arab Group emphasizes the importance of holding a conference to establish a

zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in 2012, pursuant to the action plan adopted at the 2010 NPT Review Conference (see NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I)). Parallel progress must be maintained in terms of content and timing, leading to the full and total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in the region — nuclear, chemical and biological — in accordance with the action plan. The Conference should yield concrete results on the road to achieving that goal.

The Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory and the Syrian Golan continues. Here we would like to highlight the relevant General Assembly resolutions and Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which emphasizes that the Israeli decision to annex the Syrian Golan is null and void and without legal effect. The Arab Group calls for Israel to withdraw from the

occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 and to stop its aggressive practices, which violate international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The Arab Group demands that the international community compel Israel to implement its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) so as to prevent violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air; to withdraw from the northern part of Ghajar village, Shaba'a farms and Kfar Shuba hills; and to accelerate the demarcation of the Blue Line.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.